
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
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1857
THE GREAT REBELLION

BY
ASOKA MEHTA

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TO

JAYAPRAKASH

WITH AFFECTION

It is after great hesitation that I am publishing this little book. It forms a section of a larger volume on Modern India on which I was working during my years in jail from 1940 to 1945.

This little book is, therefore, more of a torso than a full picture. But even as that it has a relevance to our times.

ASOKA MEHTA

CONTENTS

1857

It is not easy for an Indian to write about the Rebellion of 1857, of its blood and tears, its sufferings, heroism and humiliation. Until India regains her freedom the writing will never be free from emotional overtones. '1857' strikes a flint on his heart and sparks fly. Our people do not speak of the events—it is not safe to speak of them—but they hang like stalactites in the caves of our memory. A missionary once asked a group of boys to write an essay on the Mutiny. "Every youth sent in a sheet of blank paper. It was a silent, unanimous, unapologetic refusal to perform the task."[1] We have preferred to keep our thoughts to ourselves. With an obstinate silence we have rejected and passed by the spate of literature on the Mutiny that has come from British writers. It, however, continues to stalk through our memory—an unavenged and unappeased ghost.

No English writer on the other hand has succeeded in placing the Mutiny in its proper historical perspective. The British apologist has the advantage of ample material from which to elaborate his arguments. The Indians lost the war, and the records of their side perished with their fighters. No effort has been spared by British writers to besmirch the memory of the martyred heroes of Indian freedom. It is not easy to distil from their turgid accounts the limpid reality. After the intervention of almost a

1 W. H. Fitchett: *The Tale of the Great Mutiny*, p. 440.

century, it is difficult to reconstruct the personalities, the character-patterns, and the dominant ideas of the leaders of the Rebellion.

There are many accounts of the Mutiny, but no satisfactory history—none that conveys the twilight of an age deep with the fulness of a farewell feeling. Only an Indian can write a saga of those eventful years. But few Indians have yet ventured to write on the Mutiny. Vinayak Savarkar is an exception. He carried the torch of research through the dungeons of musty records and produced a valuable book. But it bears the stamp of immaturity; it surges with the passion, poetry and patriotism of youth. Lines, circles, loops of passionate outbursts and historical analyses assemble and unwind themselves in it. It is more of a manifesto than a sober history. The Mutiny awaits its immortal historians.

In the following pages no attempt has been made to give a comprehensive account of the Mutiny. We have merely sought to assess its significance in the evolution of Indian Nationalism, in the development of her people. The desideratum of completeness is unavoidable in a book of this nature. We have, however, tried to focus attention on its stern truths that were branded, as it were with hot iron, on our national consciousness.

I. THE CAUSE OF THE MUTINY

By the middle of the nineteenth century a thousand forces stirred India, moving her in many contrary directions. By 1857 the country had become a vast thunder-cloud heavy with the agony of a suppressed storm. In the preceding hundred years British power had advanced from the southern straits to the northern snows. Out of India's storm-tossed life a lotus of desire had emerged on which was poised the vision of Freedom. In some places the Princes had struggled against the British hold—as Ladwa (1845) and Angul (1847)—at other places their Diwans—as in Hyderabad, Travancore and Cochin —had broken out in resistance against the alien overlord, and everywhere the people were restive at the insatiable land-hunger of the British.

The British had annexed many states and confiscated innumerable estates. This process of disinheritance had thrown up capable leaders like Nanasahib, the Rani of Jhansi, the Begum of Oudh and other lesser lights, in whom hissed the serpent of revenge. They bestirred themselves to provide an explosive outlet for the simmering discontent. India has always been "comparatively easy to subdue, but difficult to organize".[1]

Waves of insurrection of varying intensity had been rising for some years. One serious rising had taken place in the Saharanpur district, more than one of some consequence in the Delhi Division, minor ones in Mirath and Muradabad. The rallying-cry all over the Upper

[1] William Archer: *India and the Future*, p. 42.

Provinces repeated with the most enthusiastic exultation (1824) was, "The English reign is over. Down with the English!" The Ramosi rising, under Umaji Naik, in 1826-27, had thrown Poona in turmoil. The Kole insurrection in Bihar (1831-33) was not suppressed without heavy loss of life and not until 5,000 square miles of territory had been laid waste. The Sawantwadi uprising (1844) was so serious that Outram had to employ 10,000 men against it and even then its embers kept smouldering till 1857. In 1848, the Rajas of Kangra, Jaswar and Datarpur, with the Wazir of Nurpur, backed by the prestige and influence of Bedi Bikram Singh, a descendant of Guru Nanak and Chief Priest of the Sikhs, raised the standard of rebellion, proclaiming that British rule had ceased. The end of British rule thus floated continuously before the vision of the people.

'A dangerous species of secret War' had been carried on for many years against British authority by 'numerous though unseen hands'.

"When the time appears favourable, from the occurrence of misfortune to our arms, or from mutiny in our troops," wrote Sir John Malcolm, "circular letters and proclamations are dispersed over the country with a celerity that is incredible. Such documents are read with avidity. The English are represented as usurpers of low caste, and as tyrants who have sought India only to degrade them, to rob them of their wealth, to subvert their usage and religion. The native soldiers are always appealed to, and the advice to them is, in all instances I have met with, the same: 'Your English tyrants are few in number, murder them.'"

The British, at the same time, appeared strong, rock-like and invincible. The cry of desire eddied round a chasm of despair.

The English *debacle* in the Afghan War and the stout resistance the Sikhs had offered in the Punjab Wars, shattered the spell of English invincibility. A wide-spread belief had grown up that on the centenary of the Battle of Plassey British Rule would meet its grave. The belief strengthened popular determination to achieve the end, like wind filling the sail of a ship swiftly moving with the current of the river. What had been only a vague aspiration became an all-consuming ambition when it was realized that the Sepoys were likely to cast their lot with the forces of freedom.

The Sepoys had won an empire for the British almost in a fit of absent-mindedness! As British power became supreme in the land, the position of the Sepoys became progressively depressed. "The very success which the Sepoys helped their masters to gain paved the way to their own depression."[1] Because of their power they were deeply distrusted by the Government. "In every Company there are two or three native Officers who, when they are too good, are discharged from service with full pay on retirement, on the pretext of rewarding them. So soon as Sepoys become attached to them, so soon as they encroach upon the admiration and respect which must be the exclusive property of European Officers, they are immediately discharged."[2]

The result of this policy was that the highest pay

1 T. Rice Holmes: *A History of Indian Mutiny*, p. 49.

2 V. Jacquemont: *Letters from India*, p. 23.

attainable by a Sepoy, as Subedar of the infantry, was Rs. 174 a month, a little less than the minimum pay of a raw European recruit! Wazir Khan expressed the feelings of frustration of an entire race of men when he told Sir George Campbell, 'with a shade of sadness', how he had entered the service as a Risaldar and "that is what I have been all along and always shall be. There is no promotion from that for a black man."[1] Worse still, the Sepoy's self-respect was trampled upon at every step.

"It is by no means uncommon for an officer," wrote Frederick John Shore, "to curse and swear at his men on parade, and use most disgusting terms of abuse to them."

Not only was there no promotion, but the position of a Sepoy had deteriorated steadily. As the British frontier extended further, thanks chiefly to the Sepoys' exertions, they were asked to serve farther and farther away from their homes with no extra allowances. The incorporation of Sind and the Punjab in British India involved a pecuniary loss to the Sepoys. They keenly resented the loss of *bhatha*. "They quietly agreed to strike for higher pay... and had established by an understood general consent an armed union."[2]

Though they had been recruited for work only in Hindustan, they were increasingly called upon to fight in wars across the sea. In 1824, the Sepoys at Barrackpore had refused to go to Burma and had faced with stoic heroism a shower of grape. They had sealed their determination with death. The Sepoys were, therefore, exasperated when the Governor-General enacted (1856) the

1 G. Campbell: *Memoirs of My Indian Career*, pp. i, 85.

2 G. W. Forrest: *A History of Indian Mutiny*, pp. iii, 20.

General Service Enlistment Act whereby no Sepoy, enlisted under the Act, could refuse to march whithersoever his service might be required. The Indian Army was turned by a stroke of the pen into an Imperial Army. The privileges the Sepoys of the Bengal Army had long enjoyed —such as free transit of letters and freedom from tolls while travelling—were abruptly withdrawn. The efforts to convert them to Christianity further infuriated them. "The European Officers," we are told, "promised to make every Sepoy who forsook his religion a Havaldar, every Havaldar a Subedar Major and so on!"[1] These and other grievances—the greased cartridge, for instance, —deeply agitated the minds of the Sepoys. "If the Sepoy is not speedily redressed," one of them told Sir Henry Lawrence, "he will redress himself."

This discontent was filled with a deeper significance when Oudh was suddenly and treacherously annexed. *Oudh was the home of the Sepoys; it supplied three*-fifths of the recruits annually enlisted in the Bengal Army. The national feeling of the Sepoy was wounded. He was now restless, not about petty personal grievances, but because of a deep-rooted heart's desire that called for fulfilment. His soul went out in longing to touch the skirt of freedom.[2] The Mughal Emperor, Nanasahib and the Begum of Oudh provided the traditional foci of loyalty. The budding tendrils of patriotism twined

1 A Hindu of Bengal: *Causes of Indian Revolt*, (1857).

2 The annexation of Oudh was followed by the disbanding of the State army. 60,000 men were rendered idle—every Sepoy was intimately affected by the enforced unemployment caused to his relatives.

themselves round these figures. Trained ears could hear rumblings of revolution.

Many of the pent-up forces of discontent were heaving the earth and their cumulative influence hastened the hour of explosion.

The administrative machinery was 'inefficient and insufficient'. The strain on it was so severe that whenever some new territory came under its sway, it roused, in the words of Colonel Malleson, "a very bad feeling and led to many agrarian outrages". Many districts were in permanent revolt and never submitted willingly to British jurisdiction. The isolated and scattered notes of revolt awaited the harmony of orchestration.

The administrative confusion is well brought out in the following extract from a famous minute of Holt Mackenzie:

> "Instead of taking the people as they existed, we forced them into all incongruous positions to meet inapplicable laws; and their properties were necessarily thrown into a state of indescribable confusion, from a system of revenue management conducted without judicial investigation, and of judicial decision without revenue knowledge."

The Indian officers and people alike deplored the passing of the old days and the familiar ways. Yes, gone were the good old days! Gone were the poise, the culture, the natural dignity of the traditional officials. Gone were the loose-flowing robes, the embroidered shoes, the multi-coloured turbans, the stately *hookah,* the cadenced laughter, the graceful fingering of beards, the learned literary allusions that gave charm to official papers usually dull,

the polite euphemisms, the subtle circumlocution. In their place had come alien officers who were aloof, exacting, unimaginative. Even the best among them, like Bird and Thomason, "insulted the native gentry whenever they had the opportunity of doing so".

"They look at our labour and laughter as a tired man looks at flies.
And the load of their loveless pity is worse than ancient wrongs."

Indians working in the judicial, police and revenue departments, particularly those belonging to old and honoured families, sympathized with the revolutionary movement, the bolder spirits embraced it, and they helped to throw a cloak of secrecy over the activities of the engineers of revolt.

Economic discontent added fuel to the smouldering fire. There was an annoying uncertainty about land: Government officers often annulled private transfers—whatever the mode of conveyance—and interfered with even the decisions of the Courts. The Raja of Mainpuri, for instance, was deprived of 116 out of the 158 villages in his estate. Another Raja in the same province (N.-W.P.—now the U.P.) had his Taluka curtailed by the severance of 138 out of the 216 villages that it contained; and in view of the prospect of gaining more, the Collector was ordered by Sudder Board not to carry the decree passed in his favour into effect.

The refusal of adoption was extended to landlords and many estates were declared escheat. As primogeniture was disapproved, landed property got equally divided among the heirs, with the result that men of

substance were slowly reduced to the dead level of general poverty. The process was accelerated by a system of taxation that treated the taxpayer as an apple in a cider-press. In the district of Panipat 136 horsemen were retained for the collection of revenue, while twenty-two were considered sufficient for the duties of police!

In the North-Western Provinces, owing to the harsh provisions of the settlement the rent roll was divided into three parts: $66\frac{2}{3}$ per cent was for the Government, 18 per cent for the Taluqdars by way of compensation and $15\frac{1}{3}$ per cent for the recognized proprietor as profit. Land had passed into the hands of the hard-dealing moneylenders. How hated they were is seen from the fact that with the Rebellion (1857) "the whole of these moneylenders, traders and people who came into possession under mortgages and sales have been ousted, and more than one of them murdered."

The loss had been heaviest in the case of the Taluqdars of Oudh. Out of the 25,543 villages included in their estates at the time of the annexation of the Kingdom, 13,640 paying a revenue of Rs. 35,06,519 were settled with Taluqdars, while 11,903 villages paying Rs. 32,08,319 were settled with persons other than Taluqdars. As Sir Henry Lawrence wrote to Lord Canning, the Taluqdars had lost half their villages—some had lost their all. Nor did he find that the peasantry had benefited. Heavy assessments and increased duties had driven them frantic. When the Mutiny broke out Sir Henry is reported to have remarked: "It was the John Lawrences, the Thomasons, the Edmonstones who brought India to this."

Thanks to the confusion in land tenures and the stagnation of justice it was difficult for a person connected with land to raise loans even at thirty or forty per cent. The Government's currency policy added to the general embarrassment. As Professor Thomas has shown, India suffered from a long-drawn-out depression marked by a decline of the price-level between 1825 and 1854. This was due to currency shortage and the increased demand for money occasioned by the changeover from a natural to an exchange economy.[1] With the failure of the production of silver to keep pace with the needs of the world (1850), India, placed by the Act of 1835 on an exclusively silver basis, faced growing difficulties. It was natural that the people should say: *Company ke amal men rozgar nahin.*

The economic impact of British rule on the life of the Indian people was deep and far-reaching. Its ruthless tramp brought great misery. The Adibasis provide an interesting case-study. The prowling tentacles of the British caught them in their inclement hills and they suffered invasion and subjugation for the first time in their history, stretching back into the misty past. Their traditional rights were ignored and under the inexorable working of the new courts of law, rights of law, rents and service were arrogated to themselves by wily men of 'advanced' castes. The Adibasis fought bravely to preserve their freedom and economic rights. As early as 1789 the people of Tamar broke out in rebellion and their resistance continued for many years. It burst into flames periodically as in 1794, 1811, 1817, 1820 and 1832. The

1 *Economic History Review*, 1936.

minutes of Mr Blunt, a member of the Governor-General's Council, show that the last two insurrections were primarily due to the illegal deprivation of their rights in land that Hos, Mundas and Oraons had suffered. They were, however, beaten into subjugation and serfdom.[1]

The Sonthals had shared the fate of other Adibasis. In 1854 there occurred changes that lifted awhile the clouds of depression and restored to them hope and courage. A railway line skirted Sonthal country for 200 miles and they were employed in its construction in large numbers. Every man, woman and child could get work ; the bonds of slavery to their *parvenu* landlords were loosened. 1855 was a good year—a rich harvest, high prices, general prosperity—and the Sonthals struck for freedom, 30,000 of them armed with their bows and arrows and spears organized a march on Calcutta. Their wrath was visited on the exploiters who had come in the wake of British rule. With the Zamindar of Narayanpur, for instance, there were many old scores to settle. The Sonthals cut off his legs and knees crying '4 annas', and the thighs with cries of '8 annas', then his arms they cut off for '12 annas', and finally his head for 'payment in full'. The Government drowned the rebellion in blood as ten thousand Sonthals lay dead. The spark of freedom that had burst awhile into flame was extinguished.

While economic changes coming in rapid succession destroyed the even tenor of Indian life, the social aspect of British rule, particularly under Dalhousie, was no less disturbing. His annexations—seven in eight years—

1 cf Sarat Chandra Roy : *The Mundas*.

further limited the rapidly-narrowing field in which Indians could exercise their political and administrative talents. In the pacification of the conquered territories and in the land settlement carried out in the annexed principalities, men of influence and substance were virtually penalized. His laws broke the tacit understanding between the rulers and the ruled. Acts 21 Geo. III, c 70 (1781) and 37 Geo. III, c 142 (1797) had laid down that the laws would be such as to "accommodate the religion and manners of the natives". To many Indians the social legislation of Dalhousie appeared to violate not only the spirit but the letter of the Acts. "It must be admitted," wrote Sir William Lee-Warner, "that even the most ignorant and apathetic Hindu was brought into more conscious touch with the spirit of the West during the eight years preceding 1857 than at any other period in the history of India."[1]

The Hindu was perturbed not just by the use of the State for social reform but by the implications of 'the spirit of the West' as they were unfolding themselves. Mr Mangles, the Chairman of the Directors of the East India Company, said in the House of Commons:

> "Providence has entrusted the extensive empire of Hindusthan to England in order that the banner of Christ should wave triumphant from one end of India to the other. Everyone must exert all his strength that there may be no dilatoriness on any account in continuing in the country the grand work of making all Indians Christians."

1 W. Lee-Warner: *Life of Marquis Dalhousie.*

The rearing up of orphans in the embrace of the Christian faith in 1837, the year of the great drought, "was looked upon throughout the North-Western Provinces as an example of the schemes of the Government" (Syed Ahmed Khan). In 1856, the missionaries published a manifesto in India proclaiming that the railways and steamships, by facilitating the material union of all races of men, were to be the indirect instruments for accomplishing their spiritual union under one faith.

Whatever be the reaction of the apathetic Hindu, the virile Mussalman was deeply excited. Syed Ahmed's movement did not lose strength through his demise. His apostolic successors, Inayat Ali and Wilayat Ali, continued his great work. In 1847 they were externed from the Punjab and were ordered to stay in Patna, where security was taken from them for good conduct. In 1850 they were, however, found "preaching sedition in the Rajashahi district of Lower Bengal, and were twice turned out of the District". Next year they were again found "disseminating treason on the Punjab Frontier". In 1852 the Magistrate of Patna reported: "The rebel sect is on the increase in the City; sedition is openly preached by the principal inhabitants of this capital of a British province. The police have leagued themselves with the fanatics, and one of their leaders, Maulvi Ahmed-Ulla, assembled 700 men in his house, and declared his resolve to resist any further investigation of the Magistrate by force of arms."[1] From preaching sedition, the 'Wahabis' were moving to direct action.

1 W. W. Hunter: *Indian Mussalmans*, pp. 22-3.

Another great preacher and organizer of genius, Maulvi Ahmed Shah of Fyzabad, was evoking waves of enthusiasm, like the full moon stirring the sea, through his speaking tours through the N.-W.P., Oudh and Rohilkand. The Muslims were stored with a strength, like the unshed rain in dark clouds, and they awaited an opportunity to burst on the land.

Besides religion, there were many things that baffled and irritated the people. The courts of law, for instance, sought to reduce all classes to a dead level. The British prided themselves on introducing civil equality. But the Indians noticed that it was never applied to Europeans—they formed a separate super-Brahmin caste. The caste spirit permeated the whole administration. When flogging for civil offences was abolished (Reg. II, 1834) periods of imprisonment were substituted as follows: For the 30 stripes that might be inflicted by the order of a Sessions Judge—two years; for the 30 stripes that might be inflicted by the order of a Magistrate—one year; for the 30 stripes that might be inflicted by the order of an assistant—one month. Such anomalies infuriated the people.

India was caught in the maelstrom of modernity. But it was not the usual ludicrous contrast between old bottles and new wine. The old bottles contained some precious liqueur, while the new wine contained not a little vinegar. It was no simple contest between modernity and tradition—that constant quarrel, as a Spanish proverb says, between beauty and chastity—but a confused struggle in which a proud people felt that they were being humiliated and depressed. A rebel proclamation asserted that it was a matter of common knowledge that four things

were dear to every man beyond all else, his religion and caste, his honour, his life and those of his kinsmen, and his property. The British were opposed to all four. The people had arms. It was estimated that every third man was in possession of war-like weapons. "Within the last two months," wrote Alexander Duff in 1857, "tens of thousands of muskets and other arms have been sold to Mohammedans and other Natives."[1] The bolder spirits determined to make an appeal to arms to regain the four freedoms adumbrated in the rebel proclamation.

1 A. Duff: *The Indian Rebellion*, p. 73.

II. THE BACKGROUND

In 1857 there was a favourable constellation of circumstances for a rebellion. The centenary of the Battle of Plassey was widely looked forward to as marking the end of British rule. .Mysterious symbols, like red lotuses, passed from hand to hand, binding men together and giving them collective courage. "Sepoys and agriculturists were found giving expression to this one sentiment: 'All is going to be red!' with a movement of the eyes which betrayed an extraordinary mysterious pregnancy of meaning."[1] The day of reckoning was nearing. Then heads would roll, blood would flow; old scores would be settled soon—such was the prevalent mood. The defeatist words of Ranjit Singh assumed through the determination of the people a virile and pregnant meaning. "All will go red."

The Sepoys were restive. The Bengal Army, in particular, had been for years in a state of *quasi* mutiny. If they embraced the popular cause, the road to freedom lay straight and smooth, for the military position was unusually unfavourable to the British. In 1857 the European and Native Forces in India were 40,000 and 2,15,000 respectively. The establishment of the regular forces was as follows:

	Bengal	*Madras*	*Bombay*	Total
British Cavalry (Regiments)...	2	1	1	4
British Infantry (Battalions)...	15	3	4	22
Coy's European Infantry ,, ...	3	3	3	9
Artillery Infantry (Battalions)	12	7	5	24
Native Infantry (Battalions)	74	52	29	155
Native Cavalry (Regiments)...	10	8	3	21

1 G. O. Trevelyan: *Cawnpore.*

The Native Battalions were 1,100 strong in Bengal and 900 in Madras and Bombay. The British Battalions had a uniform strength of 1,000.

The distribution of the Bengal Army, the principal sector of the total army in India, was as follows :

Native : Regular

Infantry	74 Battalions
Light Cavalry	11 Regiments
Horse Artillery	4 Regiments
Foot Artillery	2 Battalions

Native : Irregular

Cavalry	23 Regiments
Sikh Infantry	7 Battalions

Europeans

Infantry	16 Battalions
Cavalry	2 Regiments
Horse Artillery	2 Regiments
Foot Artillery	6 Battalions

(In the Artillery there were more than 12,000 Indian gunners and 6,500 Europeans.)

This force was distributed in about a hundred different places. Of the 40,000 European troops, a large portion was stationed in the two extreme possessions of the empire : the Punjab and Burma. Nearly 20,000 of the European troops were in the Punjab where they garrisoned the principal stations, and the greater part of the European Artillery was in the same province. In the rest of India-particularly the Bengal Presidency-European troops were thinly spread. In Oudh for instance, there was but one regiment. Many Strategic points, treasuries and arsenals were under Native guard.

The composition of the army—the predominance of high-caste men who were well inclined to the cause of the

revolt—was also favourable. In the Native Infantry of the Bengal Army there were 24,849 Brahmins, 27,993 Rajputs, 13,920 of lower castes, 12,416 Muhammedans, and 1,076 Christians.

The Sepoys were not only not unaware of the position but fully conscious of their strength. In secret communications of theirs, one reads, "If the Sepoys are united, the whites would be like a drop in the ocean." "Brothers, we ourselves are thrusting the foreigners' sword in our body. If we rise, success is assured. From Calcutta to Peshawar there will be an uncontested *maidan*." Once the Sepoys decided to cast their lot on the rebel side, the lotus of freedom with its inexhaustible treasure of honey seemed to open wide its petals, and swarms of brave men buzzed round it. India's pulse, to use Emerson's phrase, beat like a cannon.

The centenary of the Battle of Plassey, 22nd June, fell at a time when Hindustan is 'hotter than the furnaces of Nebuchadnezzar', when the heat strikes English soldiers like a drawn sword. In the summer months, again, the Government treasuries would be filled with the procceds of the Rabbi crop—ready for the rebels to rifle them! When the mutineers reached Delhi, the Emperor told them: "I have no treasury and you will get no pay." Quick came the reply from the Sepoys, "We shall loot the English treasuries all over India and lay them at your feet."

The plan of campaign was simple: The Sepoys were to strike all over India *on the same day*, kill European officers, break open prisons, take over the Government treasuries, cut telegraph wires and railway lines, and seize powder magazines, armouries, and forts. These blows, simultaneously delivered, would shake the edifice of the foreign

government. After these preliminary steps had been taken, a call was to be issued to the people to back the revolution with their full might. The few rebel manifestos that have come down to us testify to the political astuteness and the psychological insight of the draftsmen. The proclamations sought to make the rebellion as broad based as possible.

We can reproduce only one of them here—that issued on 29th September 1857, by a Mughal prince:

"It is well known to all that, in this age, the people of Hindustan, both Hindus and Muhammedans, are being ruined under the tyranny and oppression of the infidel and treacherous English. Several of the Hindu and Muhammedan Chiefs who have long since quitted their homes for the preservation of their religion, and have been trying their best to root out the English in India, have presented themselves to me, and taken part in the reigning Indian crusade. Therefore, for the information of the public, the present *Ishtahar*, consisting of several sections, is put in circulation; it is the imperative duty of all to take it into their careful consideration and abide by it. Parties anxious to participate in the common cause, but having no means to provide themselves, shall receive their daily subsistence from me; and be it known to all that the ancient works, both of the Hindus and Muhammedans, the writing of the miracle-workers, and the calculations of the astrologers, pundits, and rammals, all agree in asserting that the English will no longer have any footing in India. Therefore, it is incumbent on all to give up the hope of the continuation of the British sway, side with me, and deserve the consideration of the Badshahi Government, by their individual exertion in promoting the

general good, and thus attain their respective ends; otherwise if this golden opportunity slips away, they will have to repent their folly. As has been aptly said by a poet: 'Never let a favourable opportunity slip, for in the field of opportunity you are to meet with the ball of fortune; but if you do not avail yourself of the opportunity that offers itself, you will have to bite your finger through grief.'

"No person, at the misrepresentation of the well-wishers of the British Government, ought to conclude from the present slight inconveniences, usually attendant on revolutions, that similar inconveniences and troubles would continue when the Badshahi Government is established on a firm basis. Parties badly dealt with by any sepoy or plundered should come up and represent their grievances to me, and receive redress at my hands; and for whatever property they might lose in the reigning disorder, they will be recompensed from the public treasury when the Badshahi Government is well established.

" **Section I**—*Regarding Zamindars*: It is evident that the British Government in making Zamindari settlements have imposed exorbitant *jummas*, and have disgraced and ruined several Zamindars, by putting up their estates to public auction for arrears of revenue, that on the institution of a suit by a common *ryot*, a maid servant, or a slave, the respectable Zamindars are summoned into courts, arrested, put in jail, and disgraced. In litigation regarding zamindaris, the heavy stamp duties and other unnecessary expenses of the civil courts—which are honeycombed with all sorts of crooked dealings—and the practice of allowing a case to hang on for years, are all calculated to impoverish the litigants. Besides this, the coffers

of the Zamindars are annually taxed with subscriptions for schools, hospitals, roads, etc. Such extortions will have no manner of existence in the Badshahi Government; on the contrary, the *jummas* will be light, the dignity and honour of the Zamindars safe, and every Zamindar will have absolute rule in zamindari. Zamindari disputes will be summarily decided according to the *Shariat* and the *Shastras*, without any expense; the Zamindars who will assist in the present war with their men and money shall be exempted in perpetuity from paying one-fourth of the revenue; and should any Zamindar who has been unjustly deprived of his land during the English Government personally join the war, he will be restored to his zamindari and excused from paying one-fourth of the revenue.

"Section II—*Regarding Merchants:* It is plain that the infidel and treacherous British Government have monopolized the trade of all the fine and valuable merchandise, such as indigo, cloth and other articles of shipping, leaving only the trade of trifles to the people, and even in this they are not without their share of profits, which they secure by means of customs and stamp fees, etc. in money suits, so that the people have merely the trade in name. Besides this, the profits of the traders are taxed through postage, tolls, and subscriptions for schools. Notwithstanding all this, merchants are liable to imprisonment and disgrace at the instance of complaint of a worthless man. When the Badshahi Government is established, all these aforesaid fraudulent practices shall be dispensed with, and the trade of every article, without exception, both by land and water, shall be open to the merchants of India, who will have the benefit of the Government steam

carriages for conveyance of their merchandise gratis; and merchants having no capital of their own will be assisted from the public treasury. It is, therefore, the duty of every merchant to take part in the war, and aid the Badshahi Government with his men or money either secretly or openly, as may be consistent with his position and interest, and forswear his allegiance to the British Government.

"**Section III**—*Regarding Public Servants:* It is not a secret thing that under the British Government, natives, employed in the civil and military services, have little respect, low pay, and no manner of influence; and all the posts of dignity and emolument in both departments are exclusively bestowed on the British; for, the natives in the military services, after having devoted the greater part of their lives, attain to the post of Subedar, with a salary of Rs. 60 or 70 per month; and those in the civil service obtain the post of *Sudder ala,* with a salary of Rs. 500 a month, but with no influence, Jagir, or gratuity. Under the Badshahi Government, like the posts of Colonel, General, Commander-in-Chief, which the English enjoy at present, the corresponding posts of *Pansadi*, *Punchhazari*, and *Sipah-salari* will be given to the natives in the military services, and, corresponding posts of Collector, Magistrate, Judge, Sudder Judge, Secretary and Governor, now held by European civil servants, of Wazir, Kazi, Safir, Suba, Nizam and Dewan, etc. with salaries of lakhs of rupees will be given to natives of the civil service, together with jagirs, khilats, inams and influence...

"**Section IV**—*Regarding Artisans:* It is evident that the Europeans, by the introduction of English articles into India, have thrown weavers, cotton-dressers, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoe-makers, etc. out of employ, and

have engrossed their occupations, so that every description of native artisan has been reduced to beggary. But under the Badshahi Government native artisans will exclusively be employed in the services of the kings, the rajas, and the rich, and this will beyond doubt ensure their prosperity. Therefore, these artisans ought to renounce the service of the English and assist the *Mujahiddins* engaged in the war, and thus be entitled both to secular and eternal happiness.

" **Section V**—*Regarding Pundits and Fakirs:* Pundits and fakirs being the guardians of Hindu and Muhammedan religions respectively and the Europeans being the enemies of both religions, and as at present a war is raging against the English for the sake of religion, the pundits and fakirs are bound to present themselves to me, and take their share in the holy war, otherwise they will stand condemned according the tenets of the *Shariat* and the *Shastras*; but if they come, they will, when the Badshahi Government is well established, receive rent-free lands.

" Lastly be it known to all that whoever of the above named classes shall, after the circulation of this *Ishtahar*, still cling to the British Government, all his estates shall be confiscated and his property plundered, and he himself with his whole family shall be imprisoned, and ultimately put to death."

There is, we believe, no need to apologize for this long quotation; its relevance is patent. The *Ishtahar* catalogues the grievances and discontents of the different sections of the people, and also sketches the outlines of the new order the rebels desired and aspired to establish through the insurrection. The *Ishtahar* unveils the sources of strength as also the limitations of the rebellion.

III. ITS EXTENT

The backbone of the revolt was the army. Where it remained loyal, the resistance, whether feudal or popular, was negligible. The Madras Army almost wholly, and the Bombay Army with the exception of the Hindustani troops, remained loyal to the British. The sporadic outbreaks in the Deccan, though they caused a good deal of anxiety to the Government, gave them little real trouble. It was the Bengal Army that responded gallantly and set one station after another under its control in flames of rebellion, only eleven Infantry battalions remained 'loyal'. The division among the subsidiary and the contingent troops was on the same basis. Of 32,311 troops, the following units came out for the rebellion:—Gwalior: 8,401, Kotah: 1,148, Bhopal: 829, Malwa United: 1,617, and the Jodhpur Legion: 1,246. The Central Indian troops belonging to the Bengal Army joined the rebellion (all except the two Bhil Corps). The troops stationed in Hyderabad (8,094), Mysore (4,000), and Baroda (3,756), followed the lead of the Southern Armies.

The fact that Martial Law was proclaimed in the Delhi, Mirath, Rohilkhand, Agra, Benares and Allahabad divisions in the North-Western provinces, Patna and Chhota-Nagpur divisions in Lower Bengal, the districts of Neemuch and Ajmer in Central India gives a rough idea of the area of the rebellion. In the Punjab and Oudh, "the authorities acted as if Martial Law had been proclaimed". By June 1857 there were 25,000 trained insurgents in Oudh, 30,000 in and around Delhi, and some

50,000 in Central India. Delhi, Oudh, Rohilkhand and Bundelkhand shook off the yoke of foreign rule; the N.-W. P., the Central Province, the Central India States and Western Bihar became cock-pits of grim battles. Sir Richard Temple, on the news of the outbreak of the Mutiny, hurried back to India (from Italy), only to find that "every road to the Punjab was utterly closed".[1] General Havelock returning from Persia found the land route to Delhi closed and was compelled to proceed to Calcutta by sea.

In some parts of the country, the Mutiny assumed the character of a mass revolt. "In four great provinces of our empire—in Oudh, in Rohilkhand, in Bundelkhand and in the Sagar and Narmada territory—the great bulk of the people rose against British rule. In Western Bihar, in many districts of the Patna division, in Agra division and in parts of the Mirath division, the rising of the people and the Sepoys were almost simultaneous in point of time."[2]

Rohilkhand rose in a day. "In Bareli, in Shahjehanpur, in Muradabad, in Budaun, and other district towns, the military, the police, and the citizens issued Proclamations and deported the British power in the space of a few hours! Not a drop of Indian blood was shed. Instead of saying 'Rohilkhand is dependent', all said 'Rohilkhand is free', and the thing was done."[3] What Rohilkhand had achieved, the whole of India could attempt—argued the rebels. Rotate an arch and there's the dome!

On the western bank of the Jamuna a few influential

1 R. Temple: *Men and Events of my time in India*, p. 127.

2 G. B. Malleson: *History of the Indian Mutiny*, pp. iii, 487.

3 V. D. Savarkar: *War of Independence*, pp. i, 159.

rajas kept their people submissive to British rule, but the villagers of the Doab and the people on the eastern side of the Ganges threw off the yoke. "Not only in the districts beyond the Ganges but in those lying in between the two rivers, the rural population had risen... and soon, there was scarcely a man of either faith who was not arrayed against us."[1] In Oudh the lead was taken by the Sepoys. In every instance the mutiny of a regiment was followed by the loss of the districts to which it belonged. "In the course of ten days (4th to 14th June) English administration in Oudh vanished like a dream, leaving not a wrack behind. The troops mutinied and the people threw off the allegiance; but there was no ravage and no cruelty."[2] The breath of Freedom swept over Oudh and her children became soldiers and heroes at the touch of it. Within a few days Oudh was bristling with armed men—there were 100,000 of them besides the Sepoys. Over and above the fifteen hundred forts with which the province was dotted, many villages were turned into fortified places where the enemy had to face obstinate resistance. "The village matchlockmen," wrote H. C. Tucker, "fight better than the Sepoys."

Of Central India, Lord Canning wrote: "I look upon Central India as gone, and to be reconquered."

How complete was the uprooting of British authority in certain parts of India is seen from the fact that the Government at Calcutta could obtain no *direct* communications from their Commanders before Delhi and their

1 J. K. Kaye: *Indian Mutiny*, pp. ii. 195.

2 G. W. Forrest. *A History of the Indian Mutiny*, pp. i, 217.

Governor at Agra. Any scraps of intelligence that reached them came *via* Lahore and Bombay!

The capture of Delhi was the rebels' most audacious and spectacular *coup*. It gave the revolt the sanction and dignity of a national rebellion. "The sepoys found in a moment a leader, a flag, a cause and the Mutiny was transformed into a revolutionary War."[1] But more than flag and leader, or even the strong psychological appeal of the capture of the Eternal City, its seizure put the rebels in possession of sorely needed arms, for the arsenal of Delhi was stocked with 900,000 cartridges, two complete siege trains, a large number of field guns, about 8,000 to 10,000 muskets and 10,000 barrels of powder.

The resistance that people put up was stiff and sustained. Delhi, of which John Lawrence had derisively said: "Clubs are trumps—not spades", put up a fight that was without precedent; it had never offered such resistance to the invaders from the north, or the Marathas, or even Lord Lake. When the British, after many vain attempts, succeeded in storming the city, they found the rebels contesting every street and fighting every foot of the ground.[2] When the city was occupied, though the eddying eye of the whirlpool was closed, the fight was kept up in the surrounding villages. They appeared to the victors as veritable nests of hornets: "A host of fortified villages with a wide ditch and a high mud wall, swarming with thousands of armed men."

William Howard Russell, the *Times* correspondent, found, on his journey to Benares, that "in no instance

1 Justin MaCarthy: *History of our own Times*, p. iii.

2 George Campbell: *Memoirs of my Indian Career*, pp. ii, 353.

is a friendly glance directed to the white man's carriage".[1] "Villagers wore on their forehead the blood-red mark of hatred. In Bihar, the people 'constantly and systematically misled' the British with false information. In Oudh, the rebels could march without commissariat, for the people would always feed them. They could leave their luggage without guard because the people would not attack it. They were always certain of their position and that of the British, for, the people brought them hourly information. And no design could possibly be kept from them while secret sympathizers stood round every mess-table and waited in almost every tent in the British camp. No surprise could be effected except by a miracle, while rumours communicated from mouth to mouth outstripped even our cavalry."[2]

In these provinces not only the Sepoys but the police and most of the native officers of the Government joined the rebels. The moneyed class, too, wavered in its allegiance to the British. Even in the Punjab, where the British authority was never shaken, a six per cent loan of £ 1,000,000 remained under-subscribed. "In the wealthy cities of Lahore and Amritsar, men worth half a million sterling offered a subscription of £ 100 and others on the same scale."[3] The insurrection thus carried the hall-marks of a national upheaval.

In 1857 it was calculated that the deficit in the finances of the Government of India, due to the losses

1 W. H. Russell: *My Diary in India*, pp. i, 146.

2 Charles Ball: *History of Indian Mutiny*, pp. ii, 572.

3 Aitchison: *Lord Lawrence*, p. 81.

of treasuries, non-collection of revenue, destruction of public property caused by the Mutiny amounted to £ 15,000,000. The suppression of the Mutiny added to the public debt of India £46,000,000, that is, a little over three-fourths of the total debt of the Government on the outbreak of the revolt.

The Mutiny caused loss of faith in the Government: Securities fell from twenty-five to seventy-five per cent. Gilt-edged lost the gilt! The strain on the finances was so great that in October, 1857, the Bank of Bengal expressed its inability to make further advances on Government Paper.

Internal trade became very slack. Imports from England were 'almost at a standstill'. Merchants and bankers at most places stopped all business. The prices of necessities, e.g. rice, 'rose enormously'. This is not surprising when the fury of the war is realized.

In the first twelve months of the rebellion, 30,000 Sepoys fell on the battle-fields, and 10,000 armed civilians perished in encounters with the British. The number of those shot, blown from guns and hanged in pursuance of sentences by the civil and military courts had been 'frightfully great'. When the Mutiny was quelled, it was computed that "the loss of life among the Sepoys through wounds, hardships, and judicial sentences, must have exceeded a hundred thousand within two years. Of the other rebels slain in that period, the total must have been even greater. Nor had the conquerors come out of the trial without cruel loss."[1]

1 L. Trotter: *India under Queen Victoria*, pp. ii, 89.

Over two hundred thousand Indians embraced death to seek the freedom of their motherland. What the figure means becomes clear when it is realized that in the decisive battles wherein India lost her freedom, just a fourth of the casualties were recorded, as shown in the following table:

Year	Battle	Losses	
		British Side	Indian Side§
1757	Plassey ...	72*	1,000*
1764	Buxar ...	847	2,000
1803	Assaye ...	2,070	1,200
1803	Laswari ...	838	1,500
1818	Khadki ...	86	500
1818	Mahidpur ...	797	3,000
1843	Miani ...	275	6,000*
1843	Maharajpur ...	778	3,000
1845	Ferozshah ...	2,415	7,000
1845	Sobraon ...	2,383	7,000
1848	Chilianwala ...	2,446	5,000
1848	Gujarat ...	2,400	5,000

* Include the wounded also.

§ The figures on the Indian side are approximate.

These facts about the cost of the Mutiny in men and money show the extent, the heroic proportions of the great rebellion. A comparison with European events of the time shows us, in their correct perspective, the dimensions and strength of the uprising. The rebels had under their control an area of over 100,000 sq. miles and a population of 38,000,000, that is, almost equal to that of Italy. They put up as stiff a resistance as the puissant Russian Power in the Crimean War—as the figures of British casualties in the two wars show. At Lucknow, the Indians faced an army of 36,000 British troops, while in the historic siege of Sebastopol their number was only 26,000. '1857' was therefore, no mere Sepoy Mutiny. It was a grim war for freedom, worthy of our best traditions and deserving of our homage.

IV. ITS CHARACTER

English writers are in the habit of dismissing the rebellion as just a Sepoy Mutiny. Sir John Seeley, for instance, brands it as a "wholly unpatriotic and selfish Sepoy Mutiny with no native leadership and no popular support". A great historical event seldom admits of simple labelling. Different, even contradictory, strands go into the making of it. Though men respond to varying urges, it is not difficult to discover the common rhythm that disciplines and dominates them. What were the varying notes of the rebellion, and what was the dominant rhythm?

The Sepoys were undoubtedly the mainstay of the rebellion. They bore the brunt of the struggle to break the coils that imprison India. They prevented the wave of wrath against the Government from dispersing into a spray of futile gestures. They gave backbone to the resistance, became its shield and spear. They naturally sought to assert their importance, as witness the following proclamation announced by beat of drum at Banda:

Khalk-e-Khuda
Mulk-e-Padshah
Hukm-e-Sipah

Besides the Sepoys, millions of Indians participated in the rebellion. In the roll-call of the killed, their names alternate with the Sepoys. The latter, it must be remembered, joined the rebellion not to redress some grievances of service, but with the clear determination to use their disciplined strength to free the country.

There are many indications testifying the insurrection to be not just a mutiny but a national uprising.

The revolt took place everywhere in the name of one sovereign and under his flag. Ex-rulers, like Nanasahib, the Begum of Oudh, the Rani of Jhansi, Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareli, all led the revolt and occupied their quondam positions, but only as representatives of the Great Mughal. His overlordship was not just recognized, but there were sent to him as the suzerain regular reports and tributes. Every regiment mutinied with the cry: "To Delhi, to Delhi". The Emperor was the psychological as well as the political focus of the rebellion; he was the commonly accepted centre of allegiance.

The rapidity with which the revolt progressed, the vast area over which it spread, prove that it enjoyed, in that area at least, strong mass support. At many stations, Mirath and Aligarh for instance, the Sepoys were egged on to action by the citizens. Those who sided with the British had to face popular obloquy and often, as at Patna, social ostracism. Those who could not openly resist the British resorted to non-co-operation. General Havelock could get no boats and boatmen to ferry his soldiers across the river. At Cawnpore, the labourers, pressed into service by the British, stole away at night out of the camp. Anson's troops marching to Delhi found "the natives of every class: bankers, tradesmen, contractors and coolies trying to keep aloof". Where the British power was overthrown, the populace promptly armed itself—in Rohilkhand, for instance, the Sepoys were sent under General Bakht Khan to Delhi, while the local defence was taken over by a militia recruited from the civilians.

The decisive evidence showing the national character of the rebellion is the note of communal harmony it struck, the spirit of mutual accommodation it evoked in both the communities. The Government had hoped to tide over the crisis with the well-worn policy of *divide et impera.* Sir Henry Lawrence wrote to Lord Canning (May 1, 1857): "I shall watch for the differences of feelings between the two communities." When the news of the rising reached Russel Colvin, the Lt-Governor of Agra, his first impulse was to mobilize the Marathas at Gwalior, and the Jats at Bharatpur, against their 'traditional enemy'. The communal antipathy, however, failed to develop; Aitchison ruefully admits: "In this instance we could not play off the Muhammedan against the Hindu."[1] The Government failed because the *entente* was desired by both communities, each strove to conciliate the other, the leaders vying with one another in tolerance and mutual respect.

In the course of a proclamation, Khan Bahadur Khan, Nawab of Bareli, announced: "The Mussalman chieftains have all agreed, that should the Hindus join them in extirpating the Englishmen in India, they will cease to slaughter cows. Should the Hindus join them, the Mussalmans will look upon the flesh of cows with the same horror that they feel at seeing pork." The Emperor did not wait for the Hindus to join; to conciliate them he prohibited cow-slaughter forthwith. The Oudh Sepoys joyfully wrote from Delhi to their comrades at Barrackpore: "The Emperor has ordained that no more cows should be killed in the land."

1 Aitchison: *op. cit.*, p. 77.

More important than this prohibition was the offer made by the Muslim Emperor to Hindu Rajas—the unique offer of abdication. In a letter in his own hand to the Rajas of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Alwar, etc. the Emperor wrote:

"It is my ardent wish to see that the Feringhi is driven out of Hindustan by all means and at any cost. It is my ardent wish that the whole of Hindustan should be free. But the Revolutionary War that is being waged for the purpose will not be crowned with success unless a man capable of sustaining the whole burden of the movement, who can organize and concentrate the different forces of the nation and will unify the whole people in himself, comes forward to guide the rising. I have no desire left of ruling over India, after the expulsion of the English for my own aggrandizement. If all of you native Rajas are ready to unsheathe your sword to drive away the enemy, then I am willing to resign my imperial powers and authority in the hands of any confederacy of native princes who are chosen to exercise it." [1]

The Hindus evinced equal anxiety to conciliate the Muslims. In his very first proclamation at Cawnpore, Nanasahib declared his allegiance to the Emperor, and the flag he unfurled was the crescent flag (as also his ancestral *Bhagwa-Zenda*). In all his correspondence, including his letters to Maharaja Jung Bahadur of Nepal, Nanasahib used the Hijri era. His confidential adviser, who was also his principal Secretary of State, was Azimulla Khan. Hindus and Muslims worked together, their blood flowed to intermingle; all differences were forgotten.

[1] C. T. Metcalfe: *Two Native Narratives*, p. 226.

These facts add up to a picture whose lineaments are authentically national. The Sikh betrayal came only after the tide had turned against the rebels. "Sikhs enlisted," wrote Aitchison, "but not in great numbers. They held back until Delhi had fallen, and then recruits came in thousands." The Government were perturbed far more by the national character of the rising than by the Sepoy Mutiny, far-flung and formidable though it was. The repression was aimed mainly at breaking the *morale* of the *people*: "Lord Canning's mercy was always chiefly in favour of the Sepoys; he judged much more harshly those of the civil population who had been led into acts of rebellion."[1]

The war was fought as much for *Swadharma* as for *Swaraj*. Religious grievances formed an important ingredient of the dynamite that caused the explosion. A maulvi and a pundit used to be attached to every regiment to minister to the spiritual needs of the men. Many of these maulvis and pundits were won over to the revolutionary cause, and some revolutionaries had smuggled themselves into their ranks. Fakirs are reported to have played an important part in the espionage service of the rebels.

Though religious feeling strengthened the courage and composure of the rebels, it did not, thanks to communal understanding, make them fanatical. The Christians, for instance, suffered not because of their religion but because of their avowed sympathy with the enemy. English educated Indians, particularly Bengalis, suffered equally, and for the same reason, at the hands of the rebels.

1 Campbell: *op. cit.*, pp. i, 283.

"Those natives," we are told, "who had been taught English were generally, and those who were converted to Christianity were invariably loyal."[1]

The rebellion reflected the social *ethos* of the time. It was informed with traditional as well as modernist ideas. Any assessment of its character must carefully review the duality at its core.

Though religion heightened the appeal of the revolution, its content remained predominantly political. Its leaders were temporal, not spiritual, spokesmen of society. The overthrow of British authority was everywhere succeeded by the return—acclaimed by the people—of former rulers. Not only the rulers, the ancient zamindars also returned. In Oudh and the N.-W. P. the revolt assumed a mass character because of the support the zamindars offered it.

At the time of the annexation, two-thirds of Oudh was in the possession of 272 taluqdars. Of them only seven stood with the British during the Mutiny.

In the N.-W. P. where the land laws had pulverized the old nobility, neither the former owners nor the tenants were reconciled to the parvenu proprietors. The Mutiny was attended by "a considerable unauthorized disturbance of possession of land and other real property in the N.-W. P. The parties whose possessions had been forcibly disturbed had been chiefly persons who had acquired their title to the property at public sales, held either for the recovery of the Government revenue or in execution of the decrees of the civil courts. The persons by whom they

1 Holmes: *op. cit.*, p. 143.

had been dispossessed had been, for the most part, the former owners, whose proprietory rights had thus become extinguished. The dispossession of the legally installed proprietors having been once effected, it would appear that in almost all cases the raiyat-tenants paid the rent to the dispossessors."[1]

The rebellion was thus led by the traditional leaders. As in all mass upheavals, there was in 1857 destruction of government records and documents and a revolution in proprietory rights. The revolution, however, was a return to the earlier and traditional relations. In ejecting "the moneyed classes who had supplanted them, the old proprietors were assisted by their former tenants."[2] The revolt for this reason was a feudal upheaval.

But in history, as in nature, there is no complete reversal, no exact *de*volution. A mass movement has never a simple trajectory. Its course, as also its impulsions, are modified with its momentum. Even the greased cartridges, whose introduction in the Army had supplied the spark that kindled the mine of discontent into the great conflagration, were later "used without hesitation or thought of defilement against the English."[3] So vast, so cataclysmic a movement could not escape the impress of new ideas; and the Mutiny does show progressive-democratic traits characteristic of modern times.

The rebel Governments set up at Delhi and Lucknow possessed certain modern and democratic features. The

1 Duff: *op. cit.*, p. 189.

2 Forrest: *op. cit.*, pp. iii, xxi.

3 Edmund C. Cox: *A Short History of the Bombay Presidency* (1887), p. 348.

Government at Delhi "seems to have been a sort of constitutional milocracy. The King was king and honoured as such, like a constitutional monarch; but instead of a parliament, he had a council of soldiers, in whom power rested, and of whom he was in no degree a military commander. No Arabic or Persian names, forms or terms appear to have been introduced; but, on the contrary, English terms and modes of business were generally adopted. All petitions seem to have been presented to the King, but the great authority to which all of them on all matters were referred (by order endorsed on the petition) was the 'Court', a body composed of a number of colonels, a brigade-major and the Secretary. All the colonels, etc. were Sepoys who had made their mark."[1]

As the King of Oudh was a minor, the administration was vested in a Minister and a Council of State. The Council was formed by the late King's principal servants, the chiefs and taluqdars and elected representatives of the Sepoys. In the new army, the Sepoys elected their officers, and the officers chose the generals.[2] The disparity in salaries was not half as glaring as in the British Indian Army. Under Nanasahib, the pay of a colonel and a major was the same—Rs. 500, and an ordinary *sawar* received Rs. 21 a month. The Mutiny thus spelled a certain levelling and democratization.

These influences clashed with the feudal urges of the rebellion. It will be recalled that of the grievances set out in the *Ishtahar* was the levelling effect of the British courts: "On the institution of a suit by a common raiyat,

1 Campbell: *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 356.

2 J. Talboys Wheeler: *India under British Rule*, (1886), p. 265.

a maid servant, or a slave, respectable zamindars are summoned into courts, arrested, put in jail, and disgraced." The rebel zamindars were, therefore, unlikely to welcome an extension of the egalitarian pretensions of common raiyats or the Sepoys. The leaders who had ejected the new proprietors without a twitch of conscience, when it came to property rights as such were their fanatical upholders. When certain Sepoys wanted to burn and destroy government papers, Raja Kumar Singh stopped them saying, "If you destroy them, after the English are driven out of the country, there will be no proof of the amounts due from one party to another." A contemporary writer noted that not a few of the rajas "were wise enough to see that a servile war, an uprising of the lower against the higher classes, would not answer their purpose."[1]

The Mutiny, though it supplied a vent to 'all those who were discontented or in debt', could never become an authentic 'slave' uprising. With its leadership, its dominant ideology, and the surroundings in which it occurred, such a *volte face* was not easy. But it succeeded in giving the propertied classes an uneasy feeling; they felt storms, not of their making, gathering in the sky and flashes of suppressed lightning disturbed their peace. The mere possibility of the *volte face* was enough to send recreant rajas into the 'safe' British camp.

The rearguard heroism of feudalism, the incipient upsurge of mass awakening, the inchoate aspirations of nationalism and a burning sense of religious and social oppressions were mingled on the palette from which the portrait of 1857 was painted.

1 *The Calcutta Review* (1858), p. 64.

V. ITS LEADERS

It is the fate of all leaders of rebellion that if they succeed they are hailed as statesmen, but if they fail they are traduced as criminals. The leaders of '1857' have been no exception to this rule. Sober history, however, discovers in them men of commanding stature, men who dared to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm. At first sight it appears as if they were flung up like a constellation from the abyss of dark night. Such a review is mistaken. The revolt was the result of long preparation and careful organization.

It is difficult to discover the parts, to disentangle the contributions, of different leaders in the organization of the rebellion. How the army was won over, how discordant elements were brought together and conflicting claims harmonized, we have today no means of knowing. The devices they employed to stir up mass interest and evoke enthusiasm—such as the circulation of the red lotus, the mysterious movements of *chapatis*—show them to be men of deep psychological insight.

In the organization of the rebellion, there is reason to believe that Nanasahib and Azimulla Khan played a leading part. Their tour, just before the Mutiny of important stations of Northern India undoubtedly gave a fillip to, and forged closer links among the scattered nuclei of the revolt.

Nanasahib (1824—?) had, among the English, the reputation of being an easy-going, soft-headed socialite. His parties were the talk of the town and his hospitality

became more lavish as 1856 drew to its end. His breezy exterior, however, hid a man of great shrewdness, boundless patience and grim determination. Though in preparation of the uprising Nanasahib had toured some provinces, and had sold out his investments in Government Paper and kept Rs. 50,00,000 in liquid cash, the Government had no inkling of his intentions, much less of his doings. It is noteworthy that, on the eve of the mutinous outbreak, Nanasahib was invited to Cawnpore by an English general and a British collector to guard the Government treasury! He was verily a prince among conspirators, and his name has become a legend. Behind his daring moves worked the subtle brain of Azimulla Khan.

Azimulla Khan had a romantic career—almost like a character from the *Arabian Nights*. He began life as a *khansama*. His perspicacity enabled him to turn even that humble position to advantage; he learnt from his European employers English and French. He ultimately rose to be the principal adviser of Nanasahib who sent him to England to plead the Peshwa's case before the Court of Directors. He was lionized in Mayfair, voted charming and witty by the titled ladies of London. He utilized his stay in England to assess the strength and weakness of the British; and he went to the Crimean front to form an estimate of their fighting capacity. Before returning to India, he tried to enlist Turkish and Afghan support for the Indian rebellion.

If Azimulla was a clever diplomat, Maulvi Ahmed Shah of Fyzabad was an outstanding organizer. He was an effective speaker and an able commander. It was his

impassioned preaching—his lightning phrases—that enabled Oudh to spit out fire at the first spark of the Mutiny. Caught and condemned to death by the British Government, he was snatched from the gallows by the rebellion. From the cell of the condemned he stepped forth as the tribune of his people. Alike in peace and war, the Maulvi showed himself a dauntless and daring leader of men.

The military leaders of the revolt—Ahmed Shah, Kumar Singh, Tantia Tope and Laxmibai—lacked experience in the art of war. Arrayed against them were Britain's most seasoned generals. In open warfare, therefore, Indians were generally worsted by the English commanders. The rebel leaders showed themselves at their best in guerilla warfare. With much originality, flexibility and daring they harried the British forces and kept for over two years (May 1857 to November 1859) parts of India in turmoil.

The strategy of the rebellion was based on guerilla tactics that hinged on surprise attacks. Capture of Government treasuries, release of prisoners and disruption of communications were systematically carried out. Eleven to twelve thousand prisoners were set free, crores of rupees were seized from Government treasuries. Railway lines and telegraph wires were among the principal targets of attack. Ranigunj, the railway terminus, was attacked immediately on the outbreak of the Mutiny, and nearly two thousand miles of telegraph wires were cut. Other methods of transport were rendered equally unsafe. Khan Bahadur Khan had, for instance, issued the following General Order :

"Do not attempt to meet the regular columns of the infidels, because they are superior to you in discipline and

bandobast and have big guns; but watch their movements, guard all the *ghats* on the rivers, intercept their communications, stop their supplies, cut their *daks* and posts, and keep constantly hanging about their camps, give them no rest."

A contemporary British account shows how faithfully the plan was carried out:

"Never has the enemy been met without being routed, scattered, and his guns taken, but though constantly beaten he ever more rallies, and appears again ready for a fresh encounter. No sooner is one city taken or another relieved, than some other one is threatened... No sooner is one district pronounced safe through the influx of British troops, than another is disturbed and convulsed. No sooner is a highway opened between places of importance, than it is again closed, and all communications for a year are cut off. No sooner are the mutineers, and rebels scoured out of one locality, than they reappear, with double or treble force, in another. No sooner does a mobile column force its way through hostile ranks, than they re-occupy the territory behind it. All gaps in the numbers of foes seem to be instantaneously filled up and no permanent clearance or impression appears anywhere to be made. The passage of our brave little armies through these swarming myriads instead of leaving deep traces of a mighty ploughshare through a roughened field, seems more to resemble that of an eagle through the elastic air, or stately vessel through the unfurrowed ocean."[1]

The doyen of the guerilla fighters was Kumar Singh.

1 Duff, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

In rapidity of movement and gallantry in action, he, notwithstanding his four-score years, eclipsed his younger colleagues. The decimation of Dunbar's army shows how devastating guerilla tactics could be in the Bihari's skilful hands. It was the glory of the intrepid old man to die under the flag of freedom in his beloved Jagdishpur cleared of British authority. He who had firmly saddled the steed of his body for the war of freedom rightly died in harness and the sword drawn in the cause of liberty never returned to the scabbard.

The military genius on the rebel side was Tantia Tope(1819?-59), a childhood friend and life-long companion of Nanasahib. In his blood flowed all the daring and cunning of his race ; he was an heir to Shivaji's traditions, the last great bearer of the mighty mantle. His resourcefulness was a veritable talisman for the rebels . . . . . From the nettle danger it often plucked for them the flower of safety. When all seemed lost it was his imaginative daring that put the rebels in possession of the kingdom of Gwalior with its treasury, army and historic fort. Alone among the rebel leaders, he succeeded in crossing the Narmada that separated the smouldering south from the blazing north. He kept the British armies racing after him over 3,000 miles for nine months, like a cat pursuing its tail! Swift-footed and nimble-witted, he proved more than a match for the veterans of the British army. Betrayed by an ally, he died a felon's death but with the martyr's nimbus. " Show my head to the people," well might he have said with Danton, "they don't see such a head every day!"

The most inspiring figure, the nation's immortal favourite, is the flame-like Laxmibai, Rani of Jhansi

(1835-58). Brave and beautiful, she was wise beyond her years. When the Mutiny broke out, she hurried to the field.

"She snatched the spear and left the shield." She died fighting in man's garb, with a man's courage, sword in hand. She possessed an iron will and a determination that knew no surrender. When her little principality was annexed, she had said: "*Mera Jhansi deungi nahin.*" She sealed that resolve with deathless heroism. Her amazing endurance and superb horsemanship are seen in her epic escape, after the fall of Jhansi, to Kalpi, a distance of 102 miles in twenty-four hours, evading and fighting her English pursuers. On the throne and on the battlefield she evoked allegiance and inspired heroism. She was the embodiment of the rebellion; its inspirer and architect; her name has passed into the legend, history and songs of our people. Her ardent soul has lit up with a quenchless flame the altar of liberty.

The real, though unsung, heroes of the rebellion were the two hundred thousand gallant sons of India who chose death to slavery. No monuments stand to enshrine their memory, no lamps are lighted, no wreaths offered, no bells ever toll for these unknown warriors. The rulers have sought to erase their memory, but they live in the heart of every true Indian.

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun and in the morning we shall remember them."

VI. THE TERROR

When earth-shaking, sky-rending events occur, violence is inevitable—it is the midwife of such changes. In the Mutiny both sides waded through a sea of violence. Sanity and humanity would suggest the drawing of a veil over the ugly scenes, the bitter memories. No hands were clean and none need have been thrown up in horror. Unfortunately, English historians' accounts of the Mutiny are a monotonous chant of atrocity-stories. So loud and insistent is the chorus that one is driven to point out 'The Other Side of the Medal'. It is then realized that there was much in the Mutiny for Indians to resent and for Englishmen to regret.

When the volcano erupted, those near the crater were caught in the lava. The British have preserved them as petrified monuments: a Pompeii effect to indict a great nation. British atrocities, on the other hand, have been glossed over and pushed into oblivion. They, however, remain embedded in the sub-conscious mind of Indians, silently and mysteriously influencing their thoughts and emotions. Reluctantly we are compelled to cast a glance at the gruesome scenes.

To kill the English was a part of the rebel plans. At many places, e.g. Delhi, the Mutiny began with their slaughter. They fell like chaff before the scythe of the rebel reaper.

Much of this slaughter, including the unhappy events at Cawnpore, would not have occurred but for the savage and indiscriminate terror unleashed by the rulers. For

every European killed, Indians have paid with a hundred lives—but history brands them as murderers! History is verily a coquette with her cap cocked at the victors.

It cannot be gainsaid that the killing was started by the Indians. Why did they do it? The slaughter of women and children cannot be explained, much less excused. It has left an indelible blot on our escutcheon. The men were killed because it was not easy to intern them, and it was impossible to push them across the frontier. To drive them out of a district was to add to the anxieties of the neighbouring ones. On the other hand, gibbeted bodies of the once all-powerful officers offered the mass of people indubitable proof of the overthrow of British authority. In revolutionary times particularly, seeing is believing!

The British counter-terror, when all the factors are taken into consideration, was out of all proportion to the needs of the hour and exceeded all bounds. Some of their measures were natural and legitimate: such as the exaction of full revenue from re-occupied provinces, imposition of heavy fines on refractory areas, e.g. Rs. 3,00,000 on Cawnpore. But other measures were insensate and indiscriminate. In Jhansi to avenge the slaughter of 75 Englishmen, 5,000 Indians were put to death on the reconquest of the town; and the soldiers were instigated to plunder the place for a whole week.[1] In Delhi, the death of a few Europeans was avenged by shooting, killing, hanging and blowing off 26,000 Indians.

1 For an eye-witness account of the sack of Jhansi and the man-hunt organized there by the British army, cf. Vishnu Godase Varsaiker: *Maza Pravas*.

Townsmen and villagers alike fell victims to the blood-lust. Kill! Kill! Kill!—that was the refrain day after day. One unforgettable exploit is that of Frederick Cooper, Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar. The troops stationed at Lahore mutinied and killed two European Officers. The vengeance wreaked on the Sepoys is best described in Cooper's own words :

"About 150 having thus been executed, one of the executioners swooned away and a little respite was allowed. Then proceeding, the number had arrived at 237, when the district officer was informed ; the remainder refused to come out of the bastion, where they had been imprisoned temporarily a few hours before. . . . The doors were opened, and behold! Unconsciously the tragedy of Holwell's black hole had been enacted . . . Forty-five bodies dead from fright, exhaustion, fatigue, heat, and partial suffocation, were dragged out into the light."[1]

There never was a black hole at Calcutta outside Holwell's inebriated imagination. Cooper's exploit therefore remains without a precedent.

Little boys who were guilty of nothing more than waving the rebel flag were summarily executed. A batch of twelve men were hanged on the nearest trees because the men's faces were 'turned the wrong way' when they were met on the march by British soldiers. "Neill's Fusiliers killed every native whom they could catch" and knew no ruth or mercy,—they slaughtered nearly 6,000 persons in Allahabad alone! Many districts of the N.-W. P. after Renaud's forces had passed through them, looked like a vast and dreary wasteland dotted with the charred

1 F. Cooper: *The Crisis in the Punjab.*

ruins of ravaged villages. The cruel hand of death seemed to have passed over the land, uprooting all life. Worse than the physical tortures were the mental and spiritual tortures inflicted on the sensitive people of Hindustan. Muhammedans were sewn up in pig-skins and thrown into rivers or were smeared with pork-fat before their execution and their bodies were *cremated*. Pork was stuffed in the mouth of the Diwan of Fathegad before his execution. Hindus were defiled by cow's meat being forced down their throats. Irrespective of their social position, they were made to work as sweepers. Physical violence heals and is forgotten, but mental and spiritual tortures sink deep and form complexes that are not easy to eradicate.

The atmosphere of fear, dismay and despair that the terror created is caught in words of quivering pathos and haunting melody in a famous poem of Ghalib that begins as follows:

Koi ummeed bar nahin ati
Koi surat nazar nahin ati
Maut ka ek din moayyan hai
Neend keun rat bhar nahin ati

Why did the British run amok like that? It was partly the excitement of the war, heightened by the thirst for revenge. But mainly it was the rage and horror at despised natives rising against the Imperial race. The Englishman was furious at seeing the foot of the partridge red with the blood of the hawk! "The character and position of the ruling race," Sir Henry Lawrence had said, "must be maintained at all hazards." This terrible vengeance was wreaked, as Rice Holmes candidly admits,

"not more for the physical sufferings of their kindred than for their humiliation by an inferior race."[1] This 'humiliation by an inferior race' put the British in an implacable mood. The 'damned niggers' had to be taught a lesson. Their sneering attitude is well brought out in a saying that was then popular: "Peafowl, partridge and Pandies[2] rose together—the last affording the best sport."

British calumnies have stained our crimes with a deeper crimson than they deserved, and their apologists have sought to bleach their own dark and gory deeds. The injustice and anguish rankle in the depths of our hearts. "People change, and smile; but the agony abides."

1 Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

2 The rebel Sepoys were called *Pandies* after Mangal Pande who fired the first shot of the Mutiny.

VII. CAUSES OF FAILURE

The causes of the failure of the rebellion fall into two groups: one, consisting of factors that were beyond the control, and perhaps the calculations, of the rebels; the other, of those arising out of the limitations of the policy, outlook and the social origins of the rebels.

The year 1857 was favourable to the British in many ways. The Crimean War and the Chinese War were just over. The British armies, in good fighting trim, were free to throw their might against the mutineers. In the early part of the year Persia had been defeated and a new treaty of amity and friendship had just been signed with Afghan neighbours, the threat of diversions along the Bolan and Khyber passes had thereby disappeared. Internationally, the Indian rebels were isolated.

British control of the seas helped to turn this isolation into a trap. Success or reverse in the plains of Hindustan ceased to have decisive significance. This aspect of the situation was early sized up by Herbert Edwardes. He demanded holding of the Punjab and the port towns at all hazard, because they were the fulcrum of lever for the reconquest of the *hinterland.* "Make a stand. 'Anchor, Hardy, Anchor!'" said Edwardes, "If you hold the Punjab, you will facilitate the reconquest of India from the sea-board. Whatever takes place in Central India, we shall stand in a firm and honourable attitude if we maintain the capitals on the sea, and the frontier here. Between the two it is a family quarrel, an insurrection in our home." Thanks to their control of the sea, the British

could pour men and materials into India with little let or hindrance. "The sea," remarked the Indians on seeing hordes of 'red coats' along the Grand Trunk Road, "is spawning soldiers to help her children".

Heavy British reinforcements poured into India. One half of the whole British army—1,12,000 men—was sent out to crush the Mutiny; 3,10,000 men were recruited in India for the same purpose. The British troops were equipped with the most up-to-date arms, including the Enfield rifle whose introduction had marked 'the greatest military revolution of the century'. Though they had made gallant efforts to cast guns and manufacture arms, the rebels, on the whole, were badly armed. W.H. Russell, after a careful enquiry, noted that "a great proportion of the wounds, many of them very serious and severe, were inflicted by the sabre". Arms seized from Oudh after the suppression of the Rebellion show how inadequately equipped the rebels were: 684 cannon, 1,86,177 muskets, 5,61,321 swords, 50,311 spears and 6,38,683 minor weapons were collected by the Government. To meet with the *talwar* the Enfield rifle—of which Nana had said, "The blue caps kill before they fire"—was to court annihilation. The rebels sought to make good their deficiency in arms by a prodigal use of men. If they had had better arms, the Rebellion would perhaps have ended differently.

"Had the revolted army of Bengal held the Minie rifle in their hands, Delhi might still have belonged to the Mughals; and in the place of a wretched *charpai* in a prison chamber, the descendant of Timur might even now

be sitting upon the crystal throne in the palace of his ancestors."[1]

The Enfield rifle was not the only modern invention pitted against the rebels. The telegraph was another; its role was aptly summed up by the correspondent of the London *Times* : "Never since its discovery has the electric telegraph played so important and daring a role as it now does in India. Without it the Commander-in-Chief would lose the effect of half his force. It has served him better than his right arm." It was not an accident that the first act of the Mutiny was to set fire to the newly erected telegraphic office at Barrackpore. The Mutiny had come too late. Science blasted the prospects of the rebels.

The only chance of success for the rebels, against such odds, lay in delivering a knock-out blow while the advantage of a surprise attack was still theirs, for, time was working against them. If the rebellion had broken out simultaneously, as had been planned, even in the areas where it ultimately did flare up, there is little doubt that British power would have been paralysed. The lack of effective co-ordination, inevitable in so far-flung a conspiracy, resulted in a premature outbreak at Mirath on 10th May instead of 22nd June (the centenary of the Battle of Plassey), the day fixed for the general rising. This premature outbreak of the Mutiny seriously upset the plans of the rebel leaders. A premature beginning, we have learnt at bitter cost on more than one occasion, helps only the enemy. Once the time-table had been disturbed the rebels could hope to paralyse British authority only by greatly extending the area of rebellion. They

1 Ball, *op. cit.*, pp. ii, 609.

must recover in area what they had lost in timing. A widespread rebellion alone could then save the situation. The British were aware of the danger: "If the Scindhia joins the Mutiny," Canning had said, "I shall have to pack off tomorrow." But the Scindhia never joined, not only he but all the reigning princes flocked the rulers' camp.

There were two reasons why the princes did not turn against the British. The Company had insisted, particularly after 1834, that no succession to a *gadi* should take place without its sanction. "The ground for this would seem to consist in the need of securing succession of rulers who would not persistently evade their treaty obligations."[1] By manipulating successions, the Company had placed pliant princes on most of the *masnads*. Frequently the Imperial Government determined the choice of the Chief Ministers (in some states, e.g. Baroda, it was a treaty right). At the time of the outbreak of the Mutiny, in the two key States of Hyderabad and Gwalior, the Chief Ministers—Salar Jung and Dinkar Rao—were British nominees. They held their sovereigns in leash and kept them in line with the Paramount Power. The princes who had often been put on their *gadis* by the British believed that their destiny was tied up with the continuance of English rule. The success of the Rebellion would have confronted some of the princes with rivals whom the strong arm of the British held in check. It was the underscoring of this argument by the Resident that kept the Scindhia, notwithstanding powerful pressure from his court and army, loyal to the British. The principal grievance of the princes was the denial of the

1 *The Cambridge History of India*, pp. vi, 491.

right of adoption and the consequential danger of escheat. Lord Canning, on the eve of the Mutiny, privately assured the princes that the right was solemnly and perpetually assured to them."[1] By this stroke of statesmanship the princes were turned into the bulwarks of British power in India.

The rebel authority, with the contradictions in its leadership, threatened to be weak; vested interests saw the floodgates of anarchy opening. That the vested interests were substantial and dependent on the British is seen from the following table showing the distribution of the gross revenue of India.

Native States	£ 13,000,000
Rent free lands, etc.	,, 5,000,000
Sacrificed by the Permanent Settlement in Bengal	,, 2,000,000
Political pensions, assignments ...	,, 2,500,000
	£ 22,500,000
Revenue in British India ...	,, 25,300,000
Grand Total ...	£ 47,800,000

Nearly half the revenue was alienated to subsidize a native base for British rule in India.

Lord William Bentinck, defending the Permanent Settlement of Bengal and the loss of revenue it entailed,[2]

1 S. C. Macpherson: *Memorials of Service in India*, p. 311.

2 Between 1793 and 1857, cultivated area in Bengal increased from 30 to 70 million acres, while the land revenue increased only by £ 60,000. The gains of the landlords in the period amounted to over £ 140,000,000.

had said: "If, however, security was wanting against extensive and popular tumult or revolution, I should say that the Permanent Settlement, which though a failure in many other respects and in its most important essentials, has the great advantage at least of having created a vast body of landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of British Dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people." How completely these expectations were fulfilled in 1857 is borne out by the following extract from a memorial addressed (in December 1857) by the Zamindars of Bengal, headed by Mehtab Chandra, Maharaja of Burdwan, to the Governor-General:

"So essentially have they identified their interests with the rulers, that the natives of Bengal, men, women and children, have in every part of the scene of the mutinies been exposed to the same rancour, and treated with the same cruelty, which the mutineers and their misguided countrymen have displayed towards the British within their reach."

There was only one way of exploding the support the vested interests gave the British, and that was to rouse and mobilize the peasantry against the alien rulers. The rebellion, because of its feudal character, was incapable of essaying that. In the *Ishtahar* an appeal had been made to every section of society except the tillers of the soil. Everyone, except the *kisan*, was promised a better deal and a fuller pail. The prospects opened out for him were of being more securely tied to the Zamindar, of more intensive exploitation. The inability of the rebel leaders to rally the peasants to their side foredoomed their cause.

The participation of Sepoys in the rebellion was at once the expression as also the cause of the mass support to it in Oudh, Rohilkhand, Doab and the North-Western Provinces. The cavalry was mostly recruited from the Muslims of Rohilkhand, and the bulk of the infantry came from the Hindus of Oudh and the Doab. The Sepoys coming from the peasant class possessed intimate ties with the people. Fourteen thousand petitions had emanated, between the annexation of Oudh and the Mutiny, from the seventy-five thousand Sepoys belonging to the province against the hardships of the revenue system introduced by the British. Conversely, every pang the Sepoys felt vibrated through many villages. The rebellion, therefore, became in these provinces a popular uprising.

The Sepoys of the Bombay and Madras Armies did not respond to the call of the rebellion. Unlike the Bengal Army, they were mostly recruited from men of the lower castes. (The regiment of the Bengal Army was approximately composed as follows: 400 Brahmins, 200 Rajputs, 200 Muhammedans, 200 low caste Hindus.) The large number of petitions referred to above suggests that the Oudh Sepoy generally came from what we would call today the *kulak* class. There was a similar predominance of Brahmins and Rajputs among the landowners of Benares and Bundelkhand. The appeal of the Rebellion was addressed to the higher castes: for that reason, Sir Henry Lawrence, with characteristic shrewdness, had assured Lord Canning of his ability to defend Oudh with troops belonging to the Pasi (an outcaste) tribe. In October, 1857, Beadon wrote to William Muir: "We must depend entirely on the inferior castes." Because they came from

lower castes, 'the family system' could be imposed on the Sepoys of the Madras and Bombay Armies. "The family system of the Madras regiments," wrote Canning, "gives the Government a great hold on them, especially in the present case when the families will be left in Madras." The prevalence of the family system—wives, children and other relatives of the Sepoys living with them in the Cantonments—suggests that the ties with their village homes were much looser than in the case of the Bengal Army.

The rebellion sought its strength from *ci-devant* princes, ruined noblemen and deracinated feudal interests. These forces were incapable of overturning the well-entrenched British power with its strong native base; by the logic of its being the rebellion could not widen its appeal to the submerged classes who alone had the requisite strength. Its inner contradictions put a noose round the rebellion from the very beginning.

VIII. ITS EFFECTS

By 1860 the Mutiny was stamped out. But it left deep scars. It has transformed the rhythm of our nation's life.

The Mutiny widened the chasm between Europeans and Indians, making their cultural commingling more difficult. Smiles went out of fashion, even in portraiture—the proper expression for India was that of cold ferocity! The English soldiers despised Indians—even those fighting on their side. They denied the Indians a common soul, grudgingly conceding: "If the niggers have souls they are not the same as ours." Hatred is an intoxicating cup! The Mutiny produced, as W. H. Russell was quick to notice, such estrangement and ill-feeling between the two races "that perhaps confidence will never be restored". The ugly controversies about indigo, Rudd, Fuller and the Ilbert Bill that disfigured the next thirty years confirm Russell's pessimistic prognostication. The improvised gallows were taken down, but the strangling loops of prejudice remained.

The collapse of the Mutiny, likewise, generated a miasma of misunderstanding between the Muslims and the Hindus. The Muhammedans had evinced a keener and more wide-spread sympathy for the Rebellion. Even in South India, where their number was negligible, many conspiracies among the Muslims were uncovered between 1857 and 1859. The accounts of British refugees are replete with such statements as follows: "As it was a Hindu village we were not afraid to venture to it." "The

Hindus all expressed the most merciful feelings towards the Feringhis, while the Muhammedans could not disguise their murderous feelings."[1]

When the rebellion began Hindus and Muslims participated in it in large numbers. It was not a rebellion of one community. But the Mussalmans, for historical and ideological reasons, were more violently anti-British than the Hindus. To many of them, inspired by the philosophy of Shah Waliulla, India under British rule was *Dar-ul-Harb*, and a *jehad* against the alien ruler was not only a national necessity but a religious duty. The British, therefore, feared the fiery and excitable Muslim more than the proverbially mild Hindu.

The hand of repression fell heavily on the Muslims—they were as it were tattooed with terror. Many of their leading men—such as the Nawabs of Jhajjar, Ballabgharh, Faruknagar and Farukabad—were hanged or exiled. "Twenty-four Shahzadas were hanged at Delhi yesterday (18th November, 1857) morning. Two were brothers-in-law, two sons-in-law of the King, the remainder nephews, etc."[2] Muslim quarters were everywhere the target. General Neill's instructions to Major Renaud, for instance, read: "The town of Fathepur, which has revolted, is to be attacked, and the Pathan quarters to be destroyed with all their inhabitants." Muslim property was widely confiscated. After the re-occupation of Delhi, Hindus were allowed to return within a few months; but the Muhammedan population was altogether excluded

1 Ball, *op. cit.*, pp. ii, 92, 97.

2 Sir William Muir: *Indian Mutiny—N.-W.P. Intelligence Records*, pp. i, 273.

and the attachment on their houses was lifted only in 1859. In the Delhi Division every Muslim was mulcted of a quarter of his real property while the fine levied on the Hindus was just ten per cent.

The wrath of the rulers was mainly directed against the Muslims. "Show these rascally Mussulmans," wrote Capt. Roberts (the future Field-Marshal Lord Roberts) "that with God's help, Englishmen will still be masters of India." The sufferings of the Muslims were great; innocent and guilty alike perished in the flaming vengeance of the victors. The family of even a staunch loyalist like Syed Ahmed Khan paid a heavy toll in hardship and death.[1] The terror and dismay of the time are caught in the letters of Ghalib: "*Shaher sahra ho gaya* (The City has become a howling wilderness). Urdubazar is gone, what then of Urdu? Delhi is no more a city, it is a camp —the fort, the town, the bazars, and the canals, all are gone! . . . . The *Mahajan* (Hindu merchant class) remains, but of (well-to-do) Muslims only three are left . . . . So many comrades have been killed that if I die today there will be none to weep for me." The following extract conveys the insecurity of life in that period:

"Hakim Raziuddin was shot dead in the *qatle-am* (the general massacre in Delhi by the English army). Ahmed Husain Khan and his younger brother were also killed on the same day. Talyar Khan's two sons, who had come to Delhi on a visit, could not return to Tonk because of the gadar, they were hanged today."[2]

1 G. F. I. Graham: *Syed Ahmed Khan*, pp. 27-8.

2 Ghalib: *Ood-i-Hindi*, passim.

The Muslims not only braved more and suffered more in the Mutiny, but they refused to accept defeat and remained unreconciled for a long time. They kept up resistance in different forms: witness their frontier wars and the far-flung conspiracies; the centres of the two activities were Sitana and Patna respectively. They rejected English education and thereby steadily lost ground in professions and in the Government services. While the Hindus were absorbing Western ideas and adjusting themselves to the new circumstances, the Muslims remained aloof, estranged, wrapped up in their traditional beliefs. The Muslim renaissance that had been growing in Delhi wilted with the Mutiny. "Five years ago, the writer of this article visited Delhi," wrote the *Calcutta Review* (January-June, 1858), "and was perfectly surprised at the prodigious activity of the Muhammedan press in the city." The activity received an irreparable set-back in the sack of Delhi. The cultural blossoms were blighted.

"It is not difficult to trace the fatal havoc to budding spiritual life which one year of Mutiny wrought. Decay immediately overtook the revival of learning in Delhi, from which it never recovered."[1]

Calcutta, the centre of the Hindu renaissance, on the other hand, had escaped the horrors of the Mutiny and emerged unscathed not only in body but in spirit.

A cleavage thus grew up between the two communities that has developed a veritable schism in the soul of India. The communal bickerings and disputes that disfigure and poison our civic life are an unhappy legacy of post-Mutiny developments.

1 C. F. Andrews: *Zakaullah of Delhi*, p. 38.

In the wake of the Mutiny, the East India Company disappeared. By an irony of fate it was pushed off the stage of history at the same time as the last representative of the House of Timur. The first thought of the British Government on assuming direct responsibility for the administration of India was to devise measures to prevent the recurrence of mutiny. The army was reorganized and the native base of British rule was sought to be strengthened.

"The lessons taught by the Mutiny," wrote the Army Commission (1879), "have led to the maintenance of two great principles, of retaining in the country an irresistible force of British troops and keeping the artillery in the hands of Europeans." The Peel Committee on the reorganization of the Indian Army (1858) recommended in place of the old ratio between European and Indian troops of 1:5, the proportion of 1:2 for Bengal and 1:3 for Madras and Bombay. The native army was reduced by half—altogether 77 regiments were disbanded and the remaining regiments were reduced to a uniform strength of 600 men each; the reduction, inclusive of military police, was little short of 200,000 men. As the cost of each European soldier was equal to that of four or five Sepoys, the military budget of India swelled as a result of the reorganization. Further, the European army was not to be maintained as a local army. "I am irresistibly led to the conclusion," wrote Lord Canning (1859), "that henceforth it will be dangerous to the state to maintain a European local army. We cannot afford to attend to any other considerations than those of discipline and loyalty, which may be constantly renovated by the periodical

return to England of all the regiments in every branch of the service." No European soldier should run the danger of getting acclimatized to India, never must he forget that he belongs to an army of occupation. The suggestion was carried out by the Army Amalgamation Scheme of 1861—that drained India of reserves and saddled her with extra financial burdens.

Military positions and strategic points—the principal treasuries, arsenals, fortresses, etc.—were transferred to European troops, whose number had been nearly doubled. "At every large military station in the Empire there are [now] enough Europeans," observed Sir Richard Temple, "to hold their own, even in the event of a mutiny." Native artillery, with the exception of the batteries on the North-West Frontier, was abolished. Artillery was made an integral part of the Royal Artillery of the British Service.

In the new Native army men of the higher castes were excluded. The association of spiritual and military leadership—which a Brahmin Army implied—was severed. Recruitment was confined to lower caste Hindus, Gurkhas, Sikhs and trans-border Pathans. The Bengal Army, with the enlistment of 82,000 Punjabis, became virtually the Punjab Army. The new army was organized on the basis of division and counterpoise. Sir John Lawrence, Neville Chamberlain and Herbert Edwards had suggested (1858) that to keep the native army 'safe', "next to the grand counterpoise of a sufficient European force, comes the counterpoise of natives against natives. At first sight it might be thought that the best way to secure this would be to mix up all the military races in India in each and

every regiment, and make them all 'general service corps'. But excellent as this theory seems, it does not bear the test of practice. It is found that different races mixed together do not long preserve their distinctiveness; their corners and angles, feelings and prejudices, get rubbed off, till at last they are assimilated, and the object of their association is to a considerable extent lost. To preserve that distinctiveness which is so valuable, and which while it lasts, makes the Muhammedan of one country despise, fear or dislike the Muhammedan of another, corps in future should be provincial, and adhere to the geographical limits within which differences and rivalries are strongly marked." The Peel Committee endorsed the proposals and the post-Mutiny army had as its cornerstone 'the policy of water-tight compartments'. The Army as a possible fighting instrument of the people was shattered. "There is no one left in India to fight you now," a rebel Sepoy had said, "for you have beaten all the people with the Sepoys, and now you beat the Sepoys themselves."

To safeguard British rule in India, mere army reorganization was not enough. It was necessary to strengthen the regime's native base. The Queen's Proclamation (1858) when stripped of its sonorous and soporific verbiage, shows that a stronger base could be achieved by supporting the politically and socially reactionary elements of Indian society.

"After the Mutiny," wrote Sir John Strachey, "there came over the British Government and its officers almost throughout India a flood of reactionary opinions."[1]

1 J. Strachey : *India*, p. 250.

The princes had rendered valuable service in suppressing the Mutiny and had elicited from Canning the tribute of constituting " breakwaters to the storm which would have otherwise swept over us in one great wave ". " To preserve them as *the bulwark* empire has ever since been a main principle of British policy."[1] Not the princes only, but the zamindars also were taken under British wings. The Government of India wrote to the Secretary of State (1859): " The maintenance of a landed aristocracy in India, where it exists, is an object of such importance that we may well afford to sacrifice to it something. . . . " In pursuance of this policy, two-thirds of the Oudh Taluqdars—whom Canning had stigmatized as " men distinguished neither by birth, good service or connection with the soil ", were, notwithstanding their participation in the rebellion, rehabilitated " as a necessary element in the social constitution of the Provinces " ; they received back the estates under titles more favourable than even of 1856. Not merely the rehabilitation, but the *extension* of the zamindari settlement all over India was seriously mooted : " From 1858-62 the subject was under discussion in India and England."[2] Financial stringency, a legacy of the Mutiny, compelled the Government to abandon the idea ; solicitude for the landed aristocracy was to be shown, not by limiting the demands of the Government, but at the expense of the peasantry ! In Sambalpur and other Mutiny-torn districts of the Central Province, malguzari system was introduced in this period. In just one division of the Punjab, out of 46,000 agriculturists who had been

1 P. E. Roberts : *India*, pp. ii, 388.

2 H. S. Cunningham : *British India and its Rulers*, p. 162.

recorded as occupancy tenants, more than three-fourths were reduced, with a stroke of the pen, to the position of tenants-at-will, liable to ejection and rack-renting. The Taluqdars were endowed with civil and criminal jurisdiction. The Government put the feudal interests firmly in the saddle. The feudal revolt against the alien rulers ended in their strengthening of the feudal class! Such are the dialectics of social change.

The alliance with political reactionaries was accompanied by a similar support to social obscurantists. Dalhousie, it is said, "changed the squares of obsolete tradition for the rounds of civilized enlightenment".[1] After the Mutiny, the effort was to preserve the squares, and hinder their curling into circles. Progressive measures, like women's education and the suppression of polygamy, were systematically cold-shouldered by the Government. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who had succeeded in legalizing the re-marriage of Hindu widows (1856) failed, notwithstanding support from influential people, to get his Bill to restrain polygamy among Hindus (1863) on the statute-book. "A nervous fear," wrote Sir Henry Maine, "of altering native custom has, ever since the terrible events of 1857, taken possession of Indian administrators." Officials like Lepel Griffin and James Kerr advocated fostering of the caste-spirit as it 'is opposed to national union'.

The economic significance of the Mutiny was no less far-reaching. Dr Buchanan has rightly classed it with

1 H. S. Cunningham: *Earl of Canning*, p. 10.

2 D. B. Buchanan: *Development of Capitalist Enterprises in India*, p. 129.

the Opium War and the American Civil War as an important market war. The Mutiny marked the end of territorial expansion and opened the era of economic consolidation of the British power in India. "About the time of the Mutiny," wrote Sir John Seeley, "annexation almost ceased and yet the quarter of the century in which no conquests have been made has been the period of a rapid growth in trade."[1] Trade expanded by 360 per cent. Thanks, however, to India's political subjection, the effects of the expansion were nearly the reverse of those in a free country like the United States of America.

These changes threatened to stir up forces that would some day prove dangerous. With the Mutiny, Old India had shot her bolt. The danger to the Government was likely to come from the New India growing up on the intellectual pabulum coming from the West. The Government, therefore, put a term to progressive legislation; property and obscurantism became their *proteges*. The Mutiny thus marks a sea-change in the policy of the Government.

The Rebellion of 1857 was more than a mere Sepoy Mutiny, was an eruption of the social volcano wherein many pent-up forces found vent. After the eruption the whole social topography had changed. The scars of the Rebellion remain deep and shining.

1 Seeley: *Expansion of England*, p. 313.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

10th May 1857 ...	The Rebellion begins at Mirath
12th May 1857 ...	Seizure of Delhi
12th May to 24th Sept. ...	Delhi's fight for Freedom
23rd May ...	Mutiny at Benares and Allahabad
4th June ...	The Rebellion at Lucknow
4th to 14th June ...	Oudh uproots British Authority. Rohilkhand becomes free
5th June 1857 to 21st March 1858 ...	The Battle of Lucknow
5th June 1857 ...	Mutiny at Cawnpore
6th June to 26th June ...	The siege of Cawnpore
27th June ...	General Wheeler surrenders
29th June ...	British defeat at Chinhat
29th July to 16th August...	Havelock repulsed from Lucknow
14th to 20th September ...	Fall of Delhi
14th Dec. 1857 to 3rd Jan. 1858 ...	Reconquest of the Doab by the British
21st Dec. '57 to 4th Mar. '58	Re-occupation of Oudh
3rd March 1858 ...	Recapture of Bundelkhand
8th to 20th March ...	Fall of Lucknow
3rd April ...	Fall of Jhansi
6th May ...	Fall of Bareilly
23rd May ...	Defeat of the Rebels at Kalpi
2nd June ...	Capture of Gwalior
18th June ...	Death of Rani Laxmibai
20th June ...	Fall of Gwalior
2nd August ...	The end of the East India Co.
1st November ...	Queen's Proclamation
1st to 30th November ...	Operations in Oudh
7th April ...	Tantia betrayed & captured
18th April 1859 ...	Tantia hanged
October to December ...	Mopping up operations

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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i. BACKGROUND BOOKS

No satisfactory book of this type exists. The following are useful :—

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2. L. S. S. O'MALLEY:
Modern India and the West

ii. GENERAL HISTORY OF THE MUTINY

1. J. W. KAYE AND G. B. MALLESON:
History of the Sepoy War in India, 6 volumes
(Among books written by Englishmen this History remains the standard work.)
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History of the Indian Mutiny
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3. G. W. FORREST:
History of the Indian Mutiny, 3 volumes
(The military encounters of the Rebellion described in detail.)
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5. METCALFE, C. T.: *Two Native Narratives* (Both the books contain valuable information)
6. W. H. RUSSELL: *My Diary in India*, 2 volumes (Impressions at first hand of the London *Times* correspondent)